

## The Story of Stephen S. Harding (Ripley County)

Born 1808 Ontario County, New York.(1) Moved with family to Ripley County, 1820.(2) Prominent abolitionist and orator,(3) delivering powerful anti-slavery speeches throughout the area, often against public sentiment.(4) Was active in Liberty Party and Republican Party.(5) Received several appointments from President Abraham Lincoln.(6) Died February 12, 1891.(7)

Harding was an early leader in the opposition to slavery, helping to bring freedom to enslaved people in U.S.(8)

### Notes:

(1) He was born February 24, 1808. Milton A. Masing, comp., *Dearborn County, Indiana Cemetery Records* (Bowie, Md., 2000), Vol. A, Part 1, p. 86; Bureau of Census, Schedule 1, Franklin Township, Ripley County Indiana, 1880. Harding to William F. Seward, Washington, D.C., July 13, 1863, Harding MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

(2) "Memorial" by Stephen S. Harding, May 10, 1875, copied in Violet Toph, comp., *People's History of Ripley County, Indiana*. 5 vols. (Fort Wayne, 1969), 4:1725; Bureau of Census, Ripley County, Indiana, 1820. Harding was a lawyer and businessman in what is now Old Milan, Ripley County. J. David Baker, *The Postal History of Indiana*, 2 vols. (Louisville, Ky., 1976), 2: 949, 981; Bureau of Census, Ripley County, Indiana, 1840, 1850; Deed, October 8, 1834, Stephen S. Harding property at Old Milan, Ripley Co. Deed Book D, 141; Toph, 4:1427.

(3) *Free Labor Advocate and Anti-Slavery Chronicle*, August 1, 1843, June 14, 1844.

(4) According to Major Cravens, in Harding's obituary, Harding "was an original abolitionist, and made anti-slavery speeches in the days when it required nerve to talk against public sentiment." *Lawrenceburg Press*, February 19, 1891. In a report of a Free Soil Convention in the *New Albany Daily Ledger*, May 20, 1852, Harding was included as one of the party's "ablest orators." Etta Reeves French, "Stephen S. Harding: A Hoosier Abolitionist," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 27:3 (1931), 212-20, lists many speeches that she culled from now lost Harding manuscripts.

*A Biographical History of Eminent and Self-Made Men of the State of Indiana*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati, Oh., 1880), 1:78-79 and "Address of Major Cravens," *Lawrenceburg Press*, June 11, 1891, give similar accounts of a speech in front of a hostile crowd at the courthouse in Versailles where this marker has been installed.

The applicant wrote on July 28, 2003, that "The original manuscript in Stephen S. Harding's own writing regarding his speech at Versailles in June 1844 is not available and is presumed to be among the papers lost in the mail in 1936 as part of the property settlement from the lawyer at Lawrenceburg to a descendent in Denver, Colorado."

No contemporary newspaper accounts of Harding's speech have been located.

(5) In 1843 and 1846, Harding was on the Liberty Party ticket for Lieutenant Governor of Indiana. Dorothy Riker and Gayle Thornbrough, *Indiana Election Returns, 1816-1851* (Indianapolis, 1960), 173-78. In November 1844, Harding was elector for Liberty Party presidential candidate James Birney. *Ibid.*, 38, 48-52. In 1848, Harding attended the National Free Soil Convention at Buffalo, N.Y. *Buffalo Republic . . . Extra*, [August 9 and 10, 1848]. In 1852, Harding was elector for Free Soil presidential candidate, John P. Hale. *Daily Indiana State Journal*, September 23, 1852. On February 22, 1860, Harding was appointed to the Indiana State Republican Committee. Russel M. Seeds, ed., *History of the Republican Party of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1899), 31.

(6) Lincoln appointed Harding Governor of Utah Territory, March 1862. F. W. Seward to Harding, Washington D.C., April 1, 1862, Harding Collection, M130, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society. Harding was promoted to Lincoln for Utah governor by Republican "radicals" Schuyler Colfax and George Julian. Vincent G. Tegeder, "Lincoln and the Territorial Patronage: The Ascendancy of the Radicals in the West," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, vol. 35, no. 1 (June 1948), 86-88. Lincoln appointed Harding Consul of the U.S. at Valparaiso, Chile 1863. F. W. Seward to Harding, May 6, 1863, Harding Collection, M130, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society. Lincoln appointed Harding Chief Justice of Colorado Territory, July 1863; he served until December 31, 1865. "Colorado Supreme Court Justices" (accessed May 30, 2003); James Speed to Harding, Washington, D.C., January 13, 1866, Harding Mss., Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

(7) Harding was buried in Greendale Cemetery, Lawrenceburg. Masing, 83.

(8) Slavery was abolished in the U.S., December 18, 1865, when the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified. "The Constitution of the United States of America," (accessed September 17, 2003).